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Kevin Stoker

Franklin University, kevin.stoker@franklin.edu

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The Secret to Successful Projects (Hint: It's the People)

March 26, 2019 | By Kevin Stoker
Project Management

A project team collaborating

There are literally thousands upon thousands of books, articles, blogs, seminars, and airplane banner ads that can teach you how to manage and complete a project. Many of them are excellent and are recommended reading for anyone wanting to become a project manager, to improve as a project manager, or for anyone who just wants to get stuff done. (The airplane banner is not one of these recommendations, but kudos to that person for thinking outside the box.)

When I first told a supervisor I wanted to be a project manager over a decade ago, he half-jokingly pulled out every project manager's best friend, *The Project Management Book of Knowledge*, also known as the PMBOK, dropped it on the desk in front of me and said, "Read this..." After I regained consciousness and pulled myself back into my chair, I spent weeks reading it, trying to soak up everything I could. The PMBOK is the entire collection of processes, best practices, terminologies, and guidelines that are accepted as standards within the project management industry. It's a thorough text, to say the least.

In the first year or two, I went through what most new project managers go through...I knew the nuts and bolts of getting stuff done (planning, status meetings, reporting, etc.), but I was missing something. Most project managers know the basics of completing a project and can get by on that knowledge. This is all readily available and can be learned, but when all is said and done, the secret to successful projects are the people. More specifically, finding the *right* people.

How to Find the Right People

1. **Identify the Project Sponsor:** The sponsor provides final approval and funding for the project (PMI Network 2002). A good sponsor has to completely buy in to the project in order for the project to succeed. There is no project without the sponsor taking ownership.
2. **Identify Project Manager:** The project manager oversees all aspects of the project. This includes assembling the team, planning the work, and communicating to all stakeholders. A good project manager can manage the scope of work to be completed while also understanding the different personalities and strengths of each member of the project team.
3. **Identify the Core Team:** The core project team does the work of the project for a defined period of time (Peters, L.A. 2001). Members of a good core project team are experts in their field, understand the work that needs completed, and show an ability to calmly deal with sometimes difficult circumstances.
4. **Identify Stakeholders:** A stakeholder is anyone affected by the outcome of the project, positively or negatively (PMBOK 2017). In order for the project to be successful all stakeholders must be identified and communicated with on a consistent basis. Stakeholders can have a significant influence the outcome of the project despite not being part of the core team.

Simply completing a project does not mean it was a successful project. Simply choosing people to work on the project does not mean they are the right people. Take the necessary time to find the right people and you will be well on your way to success...and ignore those airplane banners ads.

References

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About the Author

Kevin Stoker

Kevin Stoker provides project management and governance of all course design within the Institute while also managing its overall project portfolio. Kevin has served Franklin University since 2006